Of Gods and Monsters (Amuse Bouche)

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Of Gods and Monsters (Amuse Bouche)

by AtticusCrete

Summary

Amuse Bouche - a small appetiser, meant to tease the palate, before the meal.

Written for the birthday challenge for @idontfindyouthatinteresting on Tumblr.

A surprisingly canon compliant divine take on Season 1, episode 2. Let's imagine there was a bit of glitter dust and celestial beings chucked at it... dialogue you'll know and love, and a different spin on the whole damn thing.

Freddie Lounds smiles to herself as she picks her way across the room. This is about as fucking bat shit crazy as she's seen in all her time in the tabloids and on tattlecrime.com. God the copy is practically going to write itself. And the pictures! The pictures are out of this world. She hasn't had something like this since, oh, maybe the Witch Trials, or the Inquisition, or even, that thing with the Medes!

This whole cabin would fit Agent Crawford's "Evil Minds" aesthetic, well it would if he had even a touch of a sense of humour. It could be a permanent installation, interactive even. Who can she get to say something outrageous about it? Maybe the anti-hunting lobby? Her readers will just adore this. It's pure click-bait.

Better still there's an ongoing story, what with the girl, the weird European doctor, and the crazy not-really-a-fed who emptied his clip into the dad.

She practically salivates. There's something here, she knows it. Smells it. She's on the scent of a great big beautiful box-office bonanza. And this gorgeous mess of a dead zoo is going to be just the first step to glory and lucre. She snaps another six pictures. The pickings are so rich. Just how many deer had Hobbs shot to create this, what? Inverted porcupine? Or an '80s BDSM Pirelli advert? Or? Oh, yes, it's like the inside of an iron maiden! She smiles fondly at the memory.

.....

Will Graham bends down and picks a group of three chanterelle mushrooms from the woodland floor. The woods at the back of his property teem with fungi throughout the late summer and early autumn and this year nature has proved especially bountiful, golden trumpets dot the earth as they walk.

'You've checked that these are edible right?'

'Will I have gathered and foraged wild edibles for longer than you've been alive, longer than this whole nation has been alive'

'Doesn't hurt to ask. It's not like they can kill you'

Hannibal smiles, he wears immortality well but it had taken half an office based session for Will to leap to his feet and laugh,

'well there's a thing, you're a god aren't you? An actual fucking deity!'

Up until then they'd been talking about Abigail Hobbs and whether or not Will ought to be in the field at all.

Hannibal had looked at him in some surprise, no one had made him for over a century, not even, just-possibly-a-sphinx-but-it's-rude-to-ask, Bedelia though she'd come close to hinting with her "person suits" and "human veil" references,

'What gave it away?'

'The entitlement, the assuredness, the Goddamn plaid and paisley combo, the accent, the omniscience, the, well, everything really. And of course.....wait a minute.....Oh. Oh fuck.'

'Ahh. So that's occurred to you then'

'Fucking hell. You're the Ripper! The Chesapeake Ripper. The Ripper is a god! No wonder Jack's missed you each time. The organs! The body parts! They're not trophies! Shit! Do they volunteer or what?'

'It doesn't quite work like that. But to some extent yes'

'Bloody hell. Jack will never believe me. No one will. Oh that's good. That's very good. Dammit. Shit, Hannibal, does that mean, god, you called him didn't you? the Shrike was one of yours? Was he... were they, what, offerings? Are you going to kill me too, or make me offer myself or whatever it is?'

'I hadn't thought to, even before. I like you. And yes, I'm afraid so, he was'

'Wow'

Will decides to stick with the bit that is most pressing,

'Do you like me enough not to eat me?'

'It would be a waste not to if you wanted it'

Hannibal looks at him with mild amusement,

'but I'd rather keep you, if that's alright with you. I haven't met some one like you for a long time!'

Will runs his fingers through his hair and scrubs half heartedly at his face,

'Ok. Wow. I get to choose. Ok. Still getting my head round this, woah. So, are you one of the big ones?'

'Big ones? Deities? If you like'

Hannibal continues to look settled and serene, tracking Will's stumbles round the room with a smile half way between amused and curious.

Will stares at him,
'What does that mean? Surely you don't do, I don't know, what's the Mount Olympus version of wife-swap, or life-swap or something?'

'There are a number of different impulses from the universe personified in a range of ways. Different religions call the same impulses by different names'

'Wow, this gives comparative religion a whole new meaning'

Hannibal smiles broadly at Will,

'indeed it does. Most recently I was worshipped by a small community in Central and Eastern Europe that favoured, shall we say, a certain degree of nocturnal fervour and aggressive biting'

Will just stares at his therapist, friend, god,

'what, were you some kind of vampire thing?'

'As you say, some kind of vampire thing'

'The blood of virgins and all that?'

'Well, not just the blood, organs too, limbs as well if there was time and not too many partakers, though blood is an easier sell to most people'

'Easy to manage the loss of a pint rather than the loss of, I don't know, a kidney?'

'Precisely'

Will was aware he wasn't sounding entirely sane right about now, his voice came out a little high,

'So. Why organs? This time around?'

'Tradition partly. The aesthetic. Also that organ meat tends to be denser in certain ritual aspects, and a higher symbolic value too, More ahh, bang for your buck. So to speak. And you're right about one bit of your profile, I do have an aptitude for the dramatic, what did you call Cassie Boyle "field kabuki"?'

'And what did she offer?'

'She was a gift, for you of course. I wanted you to see'

'Did you bloody make that tosser Garrett Jacob Hobbs appear?'

'Ahh, yes. Sorry about that.'

'Him and his bloody "see, see", it took me five times at the range, to re-qualify'

Hannibal smiles at him faintly,

'Five times. Beverly even came and helped I was making such a mess of it, fucking weaver stance'

'I'm sorry Will. I should admit to having been rather taken with you when first we met. I hoped you might find me more interesting'

'You're a fucking god, you could have just said'

'Oh, but it's no fun that way if you don't just "see"'

'Yeah alright, I get it'

From that session onwards, Will had found Hannibal turning up all over the place, almost dogging his footsteps. At one scene Will had looked around them and then hissed,

'can you bio-locate or are you actually stalking me?'

Hannibal had done his trademarked smile at the corner of the eyes,

'I could, but it's a lot of effort, Ms Katz usually texts me'

Will turned to glare at Beverly, she just waved from where she was collecting something horrible off the current victim.

'Did you put some kind of spell... no never mind'.

Today though is actually almost nice. Will doesn't want it to go to Hannibal's head so he's making sure he keeps up a steady litany of grumbles,

'mind the mud, watch out for that branch, that's Poison Ivy, oh maybe that wouldn't actually bother you would it? Don't tread on that turd, these are sharp be careful'

at some point Will catches himself,

'is it something you do? Do you mess with my head to make me look out for you or what?'

'I'm sorry Will, it's hard not to, we just put out this kind of field, an influence, anyone caught in it just wants to propitiate us in some way'

'Who's the "we" in this scenario'

'Celestial beings in general but old gods in particular'

'Is that why there's so much kinky sex in all the old myths and legends'

'We are extremely persuasive'

'Yeah. Like an avalanche, I bet'

Hannibal smiles at him again,

'over there, that looks promising'

he gestures to a patch of mushrooms further ahead of them in the wood, under an oak. It's damp and shady, perfect.

'If this was Italy or France I'd be hoping for truffles. But these are lovely'

he's about to drop to his knees when Will steps in,

'it's fine, I'll get them. Give me the knife'

Hannibal smiles, he knows Will can't help but offer, and it's adorable that Will can't help but grumble about it too. As Will kneels Hannibal rests one hand on his head,

'I will never force you to do anything you would not be willing to do if I were mortal'

Will looks up at him from where he is knelt before this golden eyed god walking in the woods, in Wolf Trap Virginia, in the fall, in his dad's old pea coat,

'I appreciate that. You'd be pretty easy to adore'

'Then I shall have to make sure you would wish to do so under conventional circumstances'

Will snorts,

'conventional circumstances?'

'Were I not a god'

Will looks at him. God, dammit, fucking hell, alright then, gods, Hannibal is beautiful. And playful, and knowledgable, and he's had an infinity of years to perfect his personhood. And Will is beginning to absolutely worship the ground he walks on. Three weeks ago Will would have said he was a straight as an arrow, now he's got a boner for a deity. He's pretty sure that's both kinky as fuck and that gods kind of transcend the whole dominant sexuality thing.

Hannibal takes the basket now filled with mushrooms from Will's hand,

'thank you Will. These are very nice'

Will rolls his eyes, and brushes off his knees as he stands up. He notices he feels immensely good, as though he has done something of enormous importance. "This is my beloved in whom I am well pleased". He wriggles under the weight of the influence, glares at Hannibal, who smiles lazily back. Fucking gods. Does feel nice though.

.....

In a seedy motel in 'god-what-a-dump' in Minnesota Freddie Lounds sits at the dressing table and adds the pictures she took to a piece she's just finished. "Inside the Shrike's Nest", shiny, spiky, slippery though she says so herself.

She stands and dries herself off a little more. She rubs her hair carefully. At 3900+ she's looking good on it. Always one to adopt technology fast and make the most of new religious impulses, thank you yes those big temples on Malta? That lovely one underground? Nice of you, pretty, oh and the offerings too? You shouldn't have. She'd come into being sometime in the late Neolithic and had hit the ground running.

There's always something new. Currently she's riding the crest of the wave of digital technology. Last century it was what? Nuclear? The century before, oil. She thinks back fondly to the Bronze Age, the Persians, dear old Cyrus, the Vikings, oh yes the Vikings, just so darling. Always someone who wants to spread a little mayhem, a little rumour, recklessness and ruin, a little disinformation. And she's always been there to lend a helping hand, or claw.

There's a ripple as she looks in the mirror and gradually the image becomes how she looks in Minnesota in the early 21st Century. Everything is shaping up just fine. And just maybe there's one of the big twelve deities around. There's certainly someone. Something. The Shrike just tastes of it.
Good, she's been itchin' for some pay back.

.....

'God that was amazing. Sorry. I didn't mean you specifically. Just, that in general that was delicious. Thank you'

Will considers once more, that he might have to revise some of his usual expletives,

'hey, if you hear people in the street shout god or Christ or something, do you sort of go "oh do they mean me?"'

Hannibal laughs,

'no, I do know the difference between someone shouting my name and calling for me. There's a qualitative difference'

'Alright. That sounds theological. Is it?'

'Sometimes. Mostly it's just that humans have become remarkably disinhibited in their use of language so I know that what used to be reserved for religious expression is now part of everyday vernacular. I can tell the difference between an expletive and genuine reverence'

'Sounds, I don't know. Maybe a bit sad? Do you ever get called by your name? Can you hear it if someone does, I mean even if you're here and they're somewhere else?'

'Usually. It depends. But we're not like those stories where if people cease to believe that you shrivel and die. We're just called by different names now. One of my cousins is "Sunday Opening Hours" another is "Black Friday"'

'Now I think you're just teasing me'

'Perhaps'

Will looks at him. He can't always tell. It's fascinating to Will, you'd think his, whatever they are now, ok, his Hannibal being a god would overwhelm his empathy. But it doesn't, he's remarkably benign and much like the surrounding environment. Whatever environment they're in.

Although physically Hannibal is the opposite of a blender, I mean, everything about him screams "look at me" like a total drama princess, psychically he's like the hum of traffic on the street, or bird song, or water over stones in a river. For Will it's incredibly peaceful. Together they form a quiet feedback loop. Almost restful.

'I'll try and make sure I only say your name if I mean it'

'That's sweet of you'

Hannibal stands to pick up the plates and carry them through to the kitchen. They ate lunch at Will's house but this dinner is at Hannibal's, just the two of them.

'It's really not. Names matter'

Will stands up and picks up the glasses and the wine cooler.

'In that case, thank you. I appreciate your concern'

'I know Hannibal isn't your, what, given name?'

'I like it. I adopted it. There was a very nice Carthaginian General. I was fond of his father and brothers too. They were quite keen in their adoration. Wanted to lay Rome to waste for me'

'Like a tribute band?'

'Just a tribute I think, will you wash or dry?'

'I can do it'

'I know you can, but it would be better if we share the task'

Will looks at him,

'alright. Not one of the lie around indolent ones then?'

Hannibal smiles at him broadly,

'I've never been Bacchus. Though I've been to some of his parties'

'You're unbelievable!'

'You seem to be doing a fairly good job!'

Will laughs,

'I know, crazy right?'

'I think you know exactly what kind of crazy you are'

Hannibal hands Will the first of the plates to dry.

'If you wanted to could you make all of this just be tidy?'

'I think that's the fairy godmother you're talking about'

'Wait! What? Are all the old stories true?'

Will gapes, his mouth falling just slightly open, Hannibal smirks,

'I apologise, I couldn't resist. I could clean all of this up but it's a waste of energy, and would mean I required an offering sooner'

'So that's why there such a gap between the sounders?'

'Primarily, yes. I've also settled here somewhat. Out of the melee, avoiding the politics, making my own little corner how I like it, I try not to draw too much attention'

'Are you talking about, what, the social scene, because according to Alana you're definitely worshipped there?'

'So, I'm told. No, not really'

'So, what then? Politics'

'In any grouping there are politics, the current manifestations leave, to my mind, something to be desired in terms of dynamics'

'Wow. There are other gods around. Do I know any of them?'

'We tend not to out each other. I'm sure you could name a few if you thought about it'

Will goggles at him,

'I don't know, uhhm, "social justice warriors" errr "internet trolls" "tumblr"?

'Very good Will. Some of these are manifestations, some are vehicles, some are offerings'

'Ok. So communism, psychoanalysis, climate change, Bryan Fuller?'

He keeps drying flatware religiously, then catches himself thinking that, god, damn, and again! Hannibal looks delighted,

'I knew you were remarkable the moment I laid eyes on you'

'So, is the world teeming with gods then?'

'A goddess in the stones? A god of the trees?'

'Something like that?'

'Tell me Will, would you really like to see?'

Will swallows,

'I think I'd like to really see you'

.....

A few days later Will can't help but think about the conversation in the woods and over dinner. He's in Elk Neck State Park. It's a beautiful day, the kind that is perfect for a walk. Hannibal for once, doesn't seem to be here. Shame. They could go for lunch, or coffee or something afterwards.

Will notices he keeps having these kind of thoughts. Little things he'd like to tell Hannibal, or suggest to Hannibal, or to offer to Hannibal, or invite Hannibal to. Must be a mortal/god thing, or he just really likes him. Can't it be both? he thinks to himself.

He hunches down next to the corpse at his feet, and then looks along the row of bodies. All converted into a mushroom garden by some crazed sod. Are these an offering? At least these aren't chanterelles. Bev is hoping for shiitake.

He sighs. He wonders if it's cheating to just up and ask Hannibal who the killer is? Would he know? Would he tell him if he knew? If Will asked? Can Hannibal raise people up? Can he cure them?

There are suddenly three million questions he wants to ask. For an atheist Will is finding it surprisingly easy to come up with things he thinks a god should know, or do, or understand. Mostly he finds he just wants to know if it works the way the main religions say, or indeed if any religion has got it right. Or even close.

As he's about to turn away the corpse next to him animates enough to grab at him.

Jimmy squeaks at Will,

'don't touch him, don't touch him'

Christ thinks Will, I'm not going to. And he has a lightening bolt thought, does any of Hannibal's god-ness sort of rub off on those around him? Has he just partially raised this guy? He'll have to ask when they meet later. Unless he's here somewhere. No, still no sign. Only Freddie Lounds. What's she doing? He frowns at her across the plantings. They haven't been introduced but Will knows all about Freddie Lounds. Well, perhaps not quite all.

.....

Freddie Lounds looks across the scene towards where she can see a dark curly haired man with glasses and frumpy clothes just standing and looking. Interesting. Who's he? She sidles up to one of the local guys looking after the boundaries at the crime scene tape,

'I'm one of the parents of the boys who found the bodies. I want to thank you for being so good with the boys'

'Those boys were very brave'

'They are good boys'

he doesn't notice the long red tongue that lizards out her mouth and cleans one eye. It's gone in a trice.

'Are you a local police detective?'

'Yes ma'am'

'Would it be an imposition to ask a few things. The boys are going to have questions and I just want to be as honest as I can be'

'Of course'

'Can you tell me what that man is doing over there by himself?'

'He's some kind of special consultant, works for the FBI'

'Oh'

She watches as Will goes into some kind of trance, he might be too far away, but she can still hear him,

"I do not bind his arms or legs as I bury him in a shallow grave. He's alive but he will never be conscious again. He won't know that he's dying. I don't need him to. This is my design"

The police detective interrupts her reverie,

'I think your family is leaving'

She's distracted but manages,

'We drove separately'

Then she sees the body grab at Will's arm, watches him step back in shock. Watches him. Now that is interesting. That's who the weird feathered stag is all about. She wonder who it is who's after him?

.....

Hannibal stretches along the sofa in Will's living room. On the table beside him Will has placed a large plate of fruit and cheeses cut up nicely. Hannibal takes the glass that's offered to him, the golden green gurwurtztraminer glinting in the evening sun of Wolf Trap, spreading like a carpet across the floor. Although he likes his own home he rather likes this one too. And truth be told although he'd say he's a pretty contented deity, he's been getting a little restless lately.

One of the dogs sighs, curled up on the floor beside the sofa. They all like him, follow him around, though Hannibal has been careful to express his influence in such a way as to not

utterly undermine Will's alpha status in the pack. After all he hasn't been Cernunnos or Artemis for a long while, gender being about as fluid as it gets with deities.

Will settles into the armchair next to the couch, he's in reaching distance of the small fire alight in the hearth. He's in reaching distance of Hannibal too, he reaches over and shakes his socked foot, just to ensure his attention,

'I was wondering today if you can raise people?'

'Hmmm? Is this because of the fungus garden? That poor man?'

Will doesn't say anything. The story is all over the press, tattlecrime.com especially.

"Special Report"

"The Garden of Eden it is not, but FBI special investigator Will Graham (38) nearly had his own resurrection moment in paradise when one of the newly discovered 'corpses' in Elk Neck State Park made a come back attempt. A local detective had this to say,

'He's a special consultant with the FBI. He's kind of crazy or at least he can think like them. Makes him useful. Great clear up rate' This may be so, but all of the FBIs work couldn't save the Would-be Lazarus who died on the way to the hospital along with the eight other victims of the Fun-Guy killer".

Hannibal looks at him considering 'I'm sorry Will, it must have been horrifying'

'I saw Hobbs again'

'Did you? Hmm. I might have been a little over zealous in animating his shade'

'Ok. What does that mean? You know there's a stag too? With feathers and everything?'

Hannibal sits up,

'A stag? No, that's not me. At least. I don't think so'

Will looks at him, his eyebrows doing all the talking, Hannibal blushes slightly, a look of wonder coming over his face,

'it's not unknown for certain animals or birds to manifest as aspects of a god's emotional and intellectual worlds. I have mentioned that I'm fond of you'

'What, so the stag is a sort of chaperone?'

'More likely a reminder, a representation of what I feel for you'

Will takes a long gulp of his wine,

'ok. I don't think I know enough about zoomorphic symbolism to get much further, you might have to spell it out'

'I haven't had this happen for several millennia. I may need some time to reflect on it'

Will looks at his err, god, he's never heard Hannibal sound uncertain ever before,

'you're not worried are you? You look worried?'

'Not worried. Surprised. This is unexpected. And...'

he trails off,

'What? What is it? What can I do?'

Will isn't entirely surprised to find he's kneeling at Hannibal's feet, maybe being the beloved of a god comes with certain obligations, or responsibilities, or the other way round, maybe gods who love mortals have to submit to certain conditions. Maybe Hannibal hadn't meant for this to go so far, whatever this is.

Hannibal makes to stand up and Will pushes himself off the floor, he notes that this is not as easy to do as he might like, lying prostrate across his hearth seems infinitely more suitable right now. So that Hannibal could walk all over him, if he chose.

'Hannibal'

Will places his hand gently on the sleeve of Hannibal's jacket,

'you look, almost afraid. What is it? Please?'

'Will, I'm not the kind of god who does especially well with supplication'

'And I'm not the kind of mortal who does especially well with that kind of answer'

They look at each other mutual warmth and affection written between them. Will's hand is still holding Hannibal's sleeve,

'you should let go'

Will fights to hang on,

'don't try to make me, please'.

Even though he does his best puppy dog eyes they stay like this, stalemate, for a number of minutes. Will can feel Hannibal fighting to hold something back, he knows he's fighting not to pursue what ever that is. There's a reason the old tales often end with bare feet running as fast as they can across frozen grass, leaving bloody footprints in their wake. No breath. Just silent pleas screamed across the night, something vital left behind.

'Will. Please'

and it's all Will can do not to be knocked sideways by the single push in those words. Shakily he steps away,

'alright. Sorry. But'

he shakes his head at himself, if he wasn't the gobby git that he is he probably wouldn't be in this situation at all,

'you know it's kind of a shitty move to pull the god thing to win an argument'

Hannibal looks at him, there's a second of something terrifying and universal in the back of his eyes, then he blinks and it's gone,

'you may remember there's a lot of smiting and thunderbolts in my back catalogue. That was quite restrained'

'I'll bear that in mind next time I'm likely to piss you off'

'You would do well to'

Will laughs at him, and Hannibal looks affronted,

'oh Hannibal you must know you have a "portentous" voice when you're trying to make a point. I mean it's sexy as hell, but it's also quite funny!'

He looks at Hannibal carefully, they're still standing opposite one another across the hearth,

'too soon?'

'If I were mortal, I'd say you might be the death of me'

Will holds out a hand then and Hannibal tentatively takes it. All their touches so far have been through cloth. Hannibal's touch tingles, like the first stage of pins and needles before the pain sets in.

'That's nice. Do you feel it too, or is it just me'

'both of us'

Will's grin broadens,

'that's fantastic. I'm going to want to hold your hand all the time now. Now will you tell me?'

Hannibal recognises the signifiers of offering and submission in Will's words and attitude, it's almost a compulsion for him to respond as he does, even gods follow patterns and rituals,

'Sometimes when gods fall in love they send out a kind of marker into the universe, it acts as a beacon, a sort of notification'

'Oh, like a group text alert?'

Hannibal considers,

'Not utterly dissimilar. Originally it was to ensure that we, well, basically didn't poach, gods are rather possessive, territorial. There's no one else in Baltimore as such, or at least not as a personification, I've effectively marked it as mine'

'Ok. I understand. Bit possessive, but, well, ok. And thanks for letting me know. And please note I didn't throw a hissy that you basically said "I love you" in a throw away fashion'

'Of course I love you. I'm a god.'

'Uh huh. Right. That's what you're going with?'

Will gives him the whole side eyes thing and Hannibal has the grace to blush, just across the bridge of his nose and his sickle sharp cheekbones,

'I'm sorry Will, you surprised me'

Will makes a 'get on with it' motion with his hand,

'unfortunately it can also attract rather less savoury personages, Demi-mortals, Demi-gods, a whole range of other beings'

'Wow! What? It's like a magnet for shit. Because I've got to say we've already got a fair amount of shit. You know we've had this uptick of deaths the last few weeks. And.. Oh.'

'I'm afraid so. I'm sorry, I couldn't help it, that first meeting in Agent Crawford's office? You were just spectacular'

'Right, twitchy, angry, glaring? That's your kink is it?'

'You were utterly beautiful, like an avenging angry angel. I was transfixed'

'So, what, we get extra killers wanting to reach out to you, make offerings? and I don't know, some kind of other thing? What do they do?'

'They will want what we have, what I have. They will try to expose me, possibly try to kill me, certainly try to take you from me, destroy what is between us'

in his voice Will can hear thunder and storms, cyclones and floods, shakily he says,

'I won't let them. You know that right? I will do everything I can to prevent that?'

He blinks a few times,

'I've no idea what I'm doing do I? How do I do that?'

Hannibal smiles at him, his head lowered so he looks up through glinting eyelashes. Mortals? So beautiful in their devotion. So lovely. Precious. Mine. He shifts slightly, changing his balance, and for a moment squeezes Will's fingers before letting go.

Will's eyes widen.

.....

Freddie Lounds sits in her car and thinks about special investigator Will Graham. Mr Not-Really-FBI though he's been given a badge and a gun. The car dips as the door opens and someone gets into the passenger seat.

'Alright? I've brought you his file. He was on the Shrike thing, the Leeds case before that. He was PD, down in New Orleans, you might get something from them. What we've got is thin. Crawford has him seeing a shrink. Address is inside. The guy's card; he's some rich European nobility socialite. Used to be a surgeon. Impressive CV. So, Graham, mandatory Psych Eval after the Hobbs bloke. He might have a thing for the girl. Parental. He's angsty, arrogant too, anti social, snarky. Rude. You might get on actually.'

'Why thank you Brian. You're just too kind. Wednesday alright? 9:00pm or morning if you can't do the evening?'

'Yeah. Alright.'

He slams the door behind him. Agent Zeller isn't quite as obsequiously devoted as she'd like but, hey she'll take it. She opens up the file and settles in to read.

.....

'Tell me again why we're in this fucking awful club Beverly Katz, this is a nightmare'

Will almost has to shout over the music "spirit in the sky" the remix not the original. He and Bev are both on the dance floor. Despite everything he's a half way decent dancer.

'We needed a break after all the shit. And anyway it's Jimmy's birthday'

'Damn, I didn't know that'

'It's alright, I forged your signature on the card'

'Great, thanks. I think. Why here though?'

'I didn't think Jack would think to come in here, he hates this sort of thing'

'No patience with it? Damn! Good call'

'Did he and Dr Lecter have dinner together or what?'

'I think Hannibal is having a go at persuading Jack to ease off on me a bit'

'But you're his favourite?'

Will looks at Beverly over his glasses,

'nice Bev. We all do our bit'

'Hey I'm not low on self esteem. And you've been doing better in that respect recently. I wonder if "therapy" is good for you after all'

she does her trade mark lascivious wink and Will feels himself flush a little.

The music in the club changes, The Stranglers.

'What is this anyway?'

'80s night. Good isn't it?'

He laughs,

'alright then'

he twirls her around and they are free and relaxed and just slightly giddy.

When Hannibal comes into the club he sees Jimmy and Brian sitting at one of the booths laughing and talking, Jimmy sees him and waves him over. Hannibal makes his way to them, and if anyone thought to notice they'd see how people just simply part to make way. He walks across the club's dance floor as though he owns it. Will catches a glimpse of him from the side and even like this he can feel the pull. Hannibal is all charisma and authority. Will shivers.

Bev twirls again but she can tell she's lost his full attention,

'what is it Will? Oh. Ok. Come on, let's go and sit this one out'

Will smiles at her vaguely, she nudges him in the ribs,

'sorry, distracted'

'I know, I can see it! Come on goof ball'

She pulls him across the floor to the booth and just for a moment she sees Hannibal look at her hand clasping Will's, pulling him along, Will laughing with her. She let's go very very quickly and takes a step back, Will doesn't notice anything but Bev sees wastelands and lava flows, terror and emptiness, pestilence and death in that look. It's her turn to shiver now.

Will is still laughing when he practically dumps himself in Hannibal's lap,

'shove up, you don't need all this space, come on'

he half sits on Hannibal and half on the bench. Hannibal puts a hand round his waist to stop him sliding off.

Jimmy and Brian squeeze round on their side so Beverly can fit. She waves at a waiter skimming along the booths looking for new orders and clearing empties. They have a shouted conversation to find out what everyone wants.

When the drinks arrive they sing a ragged happy birthday and Jimmy takes a little bow and makes a drunken speech about how nice they all are, and if you have to have a birthday at work then there's no one he'd rather have it with. Never mind the fun guy they're investigating. Hannibal bursts out laughing and the others look at him,

'what is the matter? it was an excellent pun! Very good Jimmy'

Jimmy gives the kind of worshipful look that says he might swoon if Hannibal is any nicer.

Brian gives him a fond and sloppy look 'awww. We love you too Jimmy' Jimmy blushes and ducks his head a little. They all know he's had a bit of a crush on Brian ever since he first rocked up as an intern fifteen years ago.

Ten minutes later they're still laughing and talking when Will suddenly wonders if the music level has got lower, he can hear what everyone is saying clearly, he looks at Hannibal, out of the side of his mouth he asks,

'are you doing something?'

'Only a little something, the noise level is higher than some events I've been to where there were thousands involved'

Will wonders if he's ever going to get tired of these little pronouncements,

'what? Where?'

'Everything. Everywhere'

he pauses a moment,

'Everyone. Eventually'

Will swallows, Hannibal tracks the movement down his throat, Will manages,

'what, we all call on you in the end?'

'In all kinds of extremis, yes'

'that definitely shouldn't be as hot as it is. Fuck'

'sometimes that too'

Will is suddenly conscious that he's sitting on the god who is his friend and therapist and colleague and that three of his also friends and colleagues are sitting feet away in the same booth. He gulps,

'I can't even begin to think what that might involve, I mean..'

his brain gives up and he smiles a little anxiously at Hannibal.

'I think I shall lend you a few books, so you might do some research'

'Really? What? Who? Err? God, I'm as loquacious as fuck right now'

'And I believe turned on?'

'Does it show?'

Hannibal manages to convey a glance into Will's lap by looking anywhere but Will's lap,

'I don't need to look. I can smell you'

'God, could you be any less deliberately arousing?'

He groans, he still hasn't got the hang of not prefacing everything to do with Hannibal with "god" who fortunately still seems mostly amused by this.

'Alright, book list, I'll do some research. Oh does this mean you..'

he lowers his voice,

'do you, I mean, can you be in different forms if that's erm, appropriate?'

Hannibal smiles broadly

'A swan? A cloud? A bull? Take your pick Will. You may have whatever you desire'

Will manages a small squeak.

The surrounding sound rises again and everything is lost once more into the club's '80's music night. 'Temptation' by Heaven 17 fills the room, thirty and forty somethings bopping their night away. How very fucking appropriate thinks Will.

.....

Freddie Lounds stretches as she gets out of the car, petite female human isn't a great form to be in when you're really 6'4", weigh a few hundred pounds and have naturally purple hair. God it always curls like this. Even she can't do a thing with it. She shakes her hair out a little more, concentrates really hard, and it slowly un-kinks. Better. She takes a breath and something distracts her, oh, damn, corkscrews again, and still frizzy.

From her bag she gets out a small pocket mirror, touches up her lipstick, mascara, little splash of blush. Alright. Good enough. Pretty human. Probably more convincing than some of the real ones. So weird what they do to pass.

At the reception to Port Haven Remedial Hospital and Care she rings a bell and waits for a member of staff. She'd by pass the whole thing but there's a locked door between her and the rest of the facility. When the staff person arrives Freddie's heart sinks. It's a gorgon, or one of the cousins. It's more than likely that the gorgon won't recognise her, not high enough up the food chain to be able to spot a Demi-semi-minor b-list deity, but he'll be hard to get past without the right credentials.

'I've come to see Abigail Hobbs. She's a patient here? Placed by the FBI?'

'I see. And who are you?'

'I'm a journalist. I gather she wants to see me'

'Who do you gather that from?'

'Weren't you told?'

The gorgon bristles, of course he doesn't look like a gorgon, not to everyone else, but a gorgon none the less.

Freddie presses her advantage,

'I'm so sorry, maybe you're too junior to have been told? Perhaps you could find me someone more senior. If it's not too much trouble?'

The gorgon look all kinds of annoyed, it's a good job that most of the people with whom he interacts can't see him in his at-home indoors suit.

'Have you got a card? I'll go and show the senior administrator, see what she has to say'

Freddie fishes in her bag and digs out a card, as she passes it to the gorgon with just the hint of a glamour on it, in case the admin woman is susceptible.

The gorgon disappears inside, oh, not actually disappears, just walks off into the interior of the hospital.

A few minutes later a tall, maybe middle aged woman comes back, she's clearly been told that long velvet robes suit her, and in such striking colours too,

'Ms Lounds? I've got your card here, something, oh, oh. I see. Ahh, A-te? My! I haven't seen you in a long time. Oh dear. Is this what it's going to be like? If you're here? We've already had, well, you'll know already. He's interested too. It is the Hobbs girl isn't it?'

'It is. And I'm going to go with, Isis? Because I haven't seen you since that thing in Alexandria'

'Yes. Well. Thank you for that. You know they burnt the library?'

'I do'

she smirks, Europe plunged into the dark ages once the Romans lost their way. That whole monotheism thing. She shivers,

'Never a good idea to have too much power located with just one of us is it?'

'I suppose'

Isis sniffs a little, she'd had some great reviews in that library, her greatest hits. Such a shame.

'What do you need?'

'I'd like Abigail to have my card if that's alright with you. I think she'd find it, let's just say therapeutic?'

'She's already got at least one human therapist you know. And the Agent, and, well, you know'

'I can't decide who it is. Can you tell me?'

Isis smiles,

'I could, but where would be the fun in that. I'm sure you'll work it out.'

.....

'You know Jack thinks I need therapy?'

'What I think you need is a way out of dark places when Jack sends you there'

They're back in Hannibal's office. Will has been reading Ovid, some of the major poets, bits of the Bible, some old Sumerian stories, as well as as many books of myths and legends he can find in translation. His head hurts. Back in college he'd done anthropology 101 and classical lit but that was a while ago.

Will had forgotten how odd some of the stories are. And how it is usually the mortals who come off worse, I mean, Will is pretty sure he doesn't want to be a tree. The old gods were, are demanding, petulant, high maintenance. Really something. And the sex. If anything he's a little overwhelmed by the thought of it. Talking about Abigail Hobbs is a decent distraction,

'Last time I came back I brought something with me'

'A surrogate daughter'

'Yeah. Oh. Oh. Wait. What? Hannibal, you can't give me people like that'

Hannibal looks at him blandly,

'I'm merely providing the opportunity, should it be desirable to you'

'You know that's weird right? I mean, people aren't presents, not nowadays'

'It's a recent development for humans not to be given or traded. Or offered'

'Wait, did Hobbs offer his daughter?'

'He saw it as his golden ticket. I cannot deny my worshippers Will'

'Don't you feel, I don't know, responsibility, obligation?'

'I feel a staggering amount of obligation. I have fantasised about scenarios where my actions resulted in a different fate for Abigail'

'Can you reverse time, could you go back and change it, or is that really a fantasy? Could you make it turn out differently?'

Will doesn't know if Hannibal will answer or can answer, he doesn't know the limits of what Hannibal is willing to share. He doesn't know if Hannibal has any limits or boundaries at all.

'Sometimes I drop a tea cup, I'm never satisfied if time does not reverse and the tea cup that is shattered is not gathered back together'

he pauses,

'would you like to see. I should warn you, you will feel time lag, it's a little like being drunk'

'ok, that doesn't sound too awful'

'really? You have intimate acquaintance with a glass of wine then?'

Will starts, oh. Ok.

'How badly?'

'A sort of inside out feeling, as when you are sick'

'how long?'

'However much time it takes to occur and then un-occur'

he doesn't add anything further and Will gnaws at the side of his thumb. This is the first time Hannibal has offered something of this sort. He desperately wants to try, and desperately wants to not fail. He's afraid of failing. Of falling.

'go on then, should I sit?'

Hannibal smiles and nods and takes up one of the cups on the tray beside him, they'd drunk tea earlier, and though he thinks he won't tell Will he'd known this was one of the possible trajectories their evening session might take. He empties the dregs into the other cup. No matter how good the strainer some debris always remains.

He glances into the bottom of the cup and smiles, turns it round to show Will,

'did you do that, how did you do that?'

At the bottom of the cup there is the silhouette of a stag's head.

'I did say the Ravenstag is a manifestation of my feelings for you, it will appear in a number of different contexts, especially where there are things that might gather arbitrarily'

'What, like tea leaves, and clouds, and flocks of birds, and markings on chapattis and so on?'

'Exactly so. It is both an indicator of the measure of my regard that it's appearing in this way, and as we have noted with the upswing in extreme behaviours, it's clear we are already attracting attention, psychically. Now, are you ready. I'm going to ensure it looks as though it is happening slowly though in actual fact it will happen in real time. Will? Sure?'

Will nods and Hannibal lets go of the cup. It falls in a balletic twist in the air, until it reaches the ground and then flies apart like water leaping up from the pond around a fountain. Will feels himself squeezed and clenched as everything reverses and the cup springs back together and then falls up into Hannibal's hand.

Will looks at him, and can barely breathe,

'that was, something else, truly, awesome'

he says it reverently. As though he has seen something finally in this un-shockable, cynical world that is wholly deserving of awe. He knows he has tears in his eyes and something that might mean fear or something else entirely when Hannibal pulls him across the space between the chairs, and holds him tight.

'Hush. It's alright. It only works for very very short durations, and has only a localised effect'

'All the same. That was really incredible. Do you need to... I can't even imagine, to eat something? Lie down?'

Hannibal laughs aloud,

'you are a delicious man. Sometimes all I need to live for weeks is a little genuine appreciation'

Will isn't entirely sure still if he's really allowed to be a sassy shit to his god but he's got this far,

'That's like the ultimate praise kink isn't it? I mean. Is that what we're doing here? Us, this? What is this?'

For the first time Hannibal pulls him closer still and then kisses him,

'my darling Will, it's whatever you need it to be'

Will decides the best thing he can do right now is hang on. It's no hardship. Hannibal has probably kissed a lot of mortals, and maybe some gods too. Will tries not to get too hung up on the whole gods as other beings thing. He's no Ganymede but he might find that a little too enjoyable to admit to just yet. I mean, being fucked by golden rain? That's got to be a bit of a turn on? Am I right? Will moans quietly into Hannibal's mouth. And doesn't the old god just lap that adoration right up?

.....

'Goodnight Will. I will see you soon'

In the waiting room of Hannibal Lecter's office, on the other side of the door Freddie Lounds hears the patient exit door open and close. Then there's silence and she rapidly slides her earphones off and puts her recording device away. She smooths herself down quickly.

Hannibal Lecter opens the door and smiles slightly at her,

'Ms Kimball? Good evening, please come in'

Freddie walks in and looks around, alright, this is ok. Quite. Old World? Maybe? She smiles at Hannibal,

'I've never seen a psychiatrist before, and I'm afraid I'm annoyingly thorough, you're one of three I'm interviewing, it's kind of a bake-off'

'Well, I'm very supportive off bake-offs' Hannibal can't help but think of Hestia, he'd always had a soft spot for her, ahh, those were the days.

Freddie smiles at him, and they bat a few questions and answers back and forwards. Then Hannibal looks at her with his head tipped to one side,

'Are you Freddie Lounds?'

Dammit.

'Ms Lounds, this is unethical even for a tabloid journalist.'

'I'm so embarrassed'

'I'm afraid I must ask you for your bag'

Freddie looks at him, she tries her shimmery "let's make this mortal do what I say thing", no effect. Double Dammit. And interesting too, probably one of them then.

'What?'

'Your bag, please, hand it over, I'd rather not take it from you'

Freddie can feel the push within the words, she's pretty good at resisting this level of persuasion, but not, quite enough.

'Thank you'

She takes a few breaths. Concentrates. Dammit all to Uncle Hades. Dr Hannibal Lecter seems unaffected. Right. Definitely one of the big ones.

'I was recording our conversation'

He looks at her somewhat sceptically,

'Our conversation? Yours and mine? No other conversation'

'No'

'You were very insistent about your appointment time. How did you know when Will Graham would be here?'

'I may have recorded some of your session with Will Graham'

'You didn't answer the question, how did you know?'

Freddie works incredibly hard and resists the influence with all her might, with a strangled voice she says,

'I can't answer that question'

Hannibal relents and goes to sit on his powder blue couch, he pats the seat beside him

'Come sit by me. Delete the conversation you recorded. Doctor/Patient confidentiality goes both ways. Delete it please'

He looks at her, something between irritation and perhaps admiration, she had done very well to resist. Unless? Ah.

'You've been terribly rude Ms Lounds, what's to be done about that? Or should I say A-te?'

She smiles a sharp little smile that is all lizard teeth and slot like irises,

'I didn't know if you'd know me. It's been. Well. Alright then, Dr Lecter. Or should I just call you daddy?'

Hannibal rolls his eyes,

.....

The lab team plus Hannibal and Will look miserably at the nine corpses spread out on tables in the autopsy room. The smell leaves something to be desired. They're all main-lining menthol rub smeared under their noses. Will feels a bit high on it. Though that might just be Hannibal. Hannibal himself doesn't seem particularly affected by the smell. Maybe he can switch it off and on, like a volume control except for all the senses. Oh. Maybe that's why he's so into his food? And hates Will's cologne. And loves him some opera something real. Alright then.

Will wonders if he should ask. I mean, that would be really something. Hannibal had said he thought that Will, with all his empathy and mirror neurones would be able to experience what Hannibal experiences. Will doesn't know whether that thought is amazing or frankly terrifying. Both he thinks. Both. At the same time.

The double doors swing open and Jack strides in. He stands at the end of the room legs akimbo, hands on hips. He's always a dominant presence and Will faintly considers how Jack would square up to Hannibal in a one on one fight. He'd checked with Hannibal if Jack was another deity, or Demi, or semi or something. Hannibal had smiled at him,

'Sometimes people who impress us are just impressive. Though everyone has a little bit of star-stuff in their make up'

'What does that mean?'

'My dearest, every mortal astronomer will tell you we all come from the stars. Deities, mortals, beings, planets, we are all birthed there, and will find out way there at our end'

Will faintly thinks maybe he ought to read "New Scientist" or something. If your friend, therapist, colleague, maybe soon-to-be-lover is an omniscient god it can sometimes feel like there's a bit of an intellectual gap between the two of you. Tricky. He wonders if there's a chat room somewhere where they could hang out, the mortals involved with gods. Is that a Thing? Could that be a thing? He could definitely do with some kind of support group. Deities Anonymous? He makes a mental note to google it at lunchtime.

'Will have you got anything? Or did you spend your entire evening in Elk Neck having a good time?'

Will frowns, over breakfast Jack had been mightily annoyed to discover his entire team had been in a club the night before, Will suspected it was because he hadn't been invited. When they'd all turned up looking the worse for wear he'd simmered.

Except of course Hannibal had appeared looking splendid. Not a hair out of place. Impeccable suit. Pocket square precisely aligned and setting off his tie. Will had decided that given it was 7:30 and they'd still been up at 3:00 that this was just totally unfair. He knew he looked like garbage. Bev hadn't made him feel better when she said at least he looked like hot garbage. He'd looked at Hannibal and decided he hated him. Totally. Except for the whole fall down and worship at his feet thing.

Even now a few days later Jack is still pissed about it. Just for a second Will wonders if Hannibal is wrong about the whole Jack is god thing. Jack does expect devotion, and attention, and obedience. And he's fucking high maintenance too.

'We're just talking about the bodies. Jimmy, what were they soaked in?'

'Oh, a highly concentrated mix of hardwoods, sawdust and pig poop'

He sees Bev mouth at him 'Pig Poop?' He struggles on,

'It's perfect for mushrooms and other fungi'

he has a little glare at her, Brian snorts and carries on,

'They didn't die from being buried though they all died from kidney failure'

Bev smiles,

'Dextrose in all the catheters, he probably used some kind of dialysis or peristaltic to pump fluids round after the circulatory system broke down'

Will ponders,

'So he was force feeding them sugar water?'

Jimmy grins,

'But you know who loves sugar water? Mushrooms! They just crave it'

'They're not the only thing that craves it, recovering alcoholics do too'

Brian smiles at Jimmy,

'Don't take that personally buddy'

Jimmy smells back at him, a little glint of something,

'Oh I'm not recovering'

Bev looks at them both,

'So, you feed sugar to the fungus in your body and the body creates alcohol?'

Brian smiles at her,

'It's kind of like friends helping friends really, except it's not only alcoholics who have compromised endocrine systems, they all died of kidney failure'

Will gets that kind of look, the one that says, I'm about to come up with something and you'll all go "whaaaaaaaaat ?

'Death by diabetic keto-acidosis?'

Bev looks round at the others,

'Did you know they were diabetics?'

Brian tries for stubborn, just now and again he'd like for Will not to do this when they've got an audience, he makes a face,

'We don't know they're all diabetic'

'No they're all diabetic. He induces a coma and puts them in the ground'

Brian's not quite ready to give up,

'So, then, Mr I'm-not-doctor-but-I-might-as-well-be, how he inducing a diabetic coma?'

Will looks at his friend, yeah fair enough, Zs called him on it, he's having a little show off because Hannibal is here. Sheepishly he carries on,

'He changes their meds, so he's a doctor, or a pharmacist, or he works somewhere in medical services. He buries them, feeds them sugar water to keep them alive just long enough for the circulatory system to soak it up...'

Delightedly Jimmy says,

'So he can feed the mushrooms! Ooooh. We dug up his mushroom garden'

Will sighs,

'He's going to want to grow a new one'

The others all look at him. Suddenly there is purpose and cross referencing and data analysis and number crunching and databases, and and and

'Gotcha, guy called Eldon Stammetts, they've had 10 diabetic patients go missing from different shops in the chain, he's the only overlap. Nice job Will, see and you didn't even have to meet the naughty but fun-guy'

Will narrows his eyes at her,

Hannibal smiles,
'dearest Will, you know, the mirrors in your mind reflect the best of you, not just the worst of someone else'

Jimmy sighs 'god Will, he's just divine'

Will looks at him, and then at Bev and Brian, they are looking at him expectantly too, 'really? You have no idea! Don't say that! It'll go to his head!'

Bev mutters 'and the rest'

'What?' Will asks her sharply,

'Not a thing!'

He narrows his eyes at her again. God, they're ganging up now. He turns to glare at Hannibal who looks back at him with adoration on his face,

'And you can stop with the heart eyes thing'

Hannibal smiles some more and the rest of the team look at Will as though he is mad,

'Come on then we're going to go and find the sodding fun-guy'

Jimmy and Hannibal both smirk.

'Not you! You've not been cleared for the field!'

Hannibal pouts. With his top lip. Hell's teeth, who even does that?

.....

At the pharmacists Jack takes absolute charge, he's totally, terrifyingly the business at this and Will knows to just slide along in his wake.

'Alright, put your hands in the air! Which one of you is Eldon Stammetts?'

One of the pharmacists gulps nervously, he looks as though he and his bladder are both trying to keep up. His bladder might be losing. He squeaks,

'He was just here, just now'

Will looks around,

'Is his car still in the car park?'

The guys quivers, his bladder is definitely losing, not helped by Jack shouting,

'HIS CAR?'

When they run for the car park Stammetts is gone, but his most recent victim is still in the trunk of his car,

'She's alive, I NEED EMTs NOW'

The ambulance crew rush in and Jack and Will fall back. Jimmy and Bev sidle up to them,

'Errr. We were err, just checking Stammetts' work station'

Jack glares,

'Am I gonna want to hear this?'

'Yes.... mostly no..... but yes'

Bev starts to read out the TattleCrime article that Freddie has now written.

"The FBI isn't just hunting pscychopaths, they're headhunting them with competitive pay and benefits. Using one demented mind to catch another"

She looks up at them, tries a small smile,

'It's about Will. She. Err. She goes into a lot of detail. Sorry Will'

.....

Back at his Baltimore house Hannibal opens up the tab on his browser, the one that is pretty well dedicated to tattlecrime.com. He sees the new headline and scans through the article.

His little girl, A-te, all gown up now. She's always been good at this sort of thing, twisting things, manipulating, just making enough implications and insinuations to really ruin

someone's day.

'Oh, you are naughty Ms Lounds'

And really he'd be almost proud. Except that it's Will she's setting up. And that just won't do at all. Of course he could let her know in a myriad of ways. Mercury is pretty ubiquitous these days, currently pulling 24/7/365 as the World Wide Web, but he's often a little busy. Maybe Iris then. He gets out his cell. Her coverage is pretty good.

A-te, darling girl you are very 0-ty. If WG is hurt there will be hell to pay. And u know what that means don't you?

.....

In her motel room Freddie is lounging around just thinking about Will Graham, her dad, Isis and the various things she thinks might be circling. She hears the buzz of a text come through. Thanks Iris she thinks, pretty well automatically. She reads the message. Dammit. Oh well. It's not over yet. And anyway she and her cousin Persephone always got on well. Though possibly she's gaining a lot of headway as "zero hours contracts" and might be too busy to play. Her dad is just too much of a big deal, and he doesn't do well with being thwarted. He's got a terrible temper.

But, and here's a thing, she really is sending out a lot of waves. That plus the stag? That's bound to attract the heavyweights. At least one of them for sure. Like a big-old-knock-down-fight-at-Vegas payout. She sniffs. In the meantime she can at least distract Hannibal. She has a little tut-tut to herself. It's a bit déclassé, calling yourself after one of your biggest fans. It's usually the other way round!

Ahh well, better get on with the day. She puts a few things into her bag and then goes into the bathroom. In the mirror she sees a faint glimmering behind her

'Dad?'

She whispers. Then there are two sharp raps on the room's crappy plywood door.

'Who is it?'

When there's no reply, she asks again,

'Who is it?'

Gods don't usually bother to knock, so it's probably some mortals. Boring. She does her own shimmer and is back to human again. Just in time when the door is thrown open and she ends up sprawled across her motel bed. One of the feds gets a cable tie round her wrists and pulls it tight. Not too tight. Though it's close. She stops struggling. Her face still down against the coverlet.

Eww she thinks. Motel bedspreads are gross. Her nose is mashed up against it and she rapidly scales back her sense of smell. It's usually her most heightened sense, after all she needs to be

able to scent out a good story. She struggles up to a sitting position and looks up at Jack Crawford,

'I appreciate the pageantry Agent Crawford but you can't arrest me for writing an article'

Jack glares, and really, if he was a deity she'd be a small pile of smouldering gloop right now.

'You entered a federal crime scene without permission'

'Escorted by a detective'

'Under false pretences'

Yeah, fair enough, one to Jack, if they're counting,

'It is as good as permission'

'You lied to a police officer'

She smirks, one all,

'Can't arrest me for lying'

He looks sternly at her then, cynicism and frustration writ large across his features,

'You got all that from a local detective?'

'Lot of talk about your man Graham. Plus rivalry over who gets the collar. Local police detective looking for a pissing contest with the FBI might have insight'

'And evidently did'

'Sure did'

They bat at each other through a few more exchanges, until he says

'I won't have to arrest you if you don't write another word about Will Graham'

She smiles sweetly at Jack Crawford. He doesn't return it. He turns and stomps off. The other agents follow. Zeller is left at the end and he cuts off the cable tie, muttering as he does so,

'I should leave you like that. You used me'

She smiles at him,

'Still on for Wednesday?'

He snorts. And furtively nods.

.....

Will sits in Abigail Hobbs' hospital room. He wonders for a moment if Hannibal will have seen the article. He's a teeny tiny little bit embarrassed about it. I mean, he's good, but he's not that good. And he really doesn't want anyone else getting ideas. One deity crushing on him is quite enough.

He realises he's tingling all over, he tenses slightly, what the fu.. then the sees the antlered Ravenstag walk past the open doorway. Oh. Well. That's sort of reassuring. He yawns and drags himself to his feet and puts his head round the corner. There it goes. He wonders if he's supposed to follow. The stag and turns and looks at Will, over his shoulder. Will could swear its batting it's eyelashes at him. Oh for goodness sake.

The stag gives a happy little snort as he comes closer and then runs his hands through the feathers on its neck. When he rubs his nose against the stag's cheek the stag rubs up against Will. Not quite hard enough to knock Will over, but close,

'Careful'

The stag snorts again and shakes itself. It crowds Will up against a door that opens into a janitor's closet. Great thinks Will, how romantic. The stag nuzzles against his neck and Will wiffles against his throat,

'Yeah, yeah, alright. I'm glad to see you too'

The stag paws at him. Will could swear it's smirking.

.....

Freddie closes her crappy motel's crappy door behind her, as she walks down the cement stairs from the first floor to the ground, her heart sinks. It's the local detective, and he sure looks pissed.

'I don't know where you got half that information from, wasn't from me'

'I may have made some inferences'

'They think I told you all of it'

She reaches the ground and looks at him,

'They saw you talking to me'

'They also think it's my fault the fun-guy escaped'

'I'm sorry I got you fired'

'You didn't, I'm only suspended'

'You will be. Jack Crawford will want your head. I can help you get work outside the force. I know people in the private sector'

He looks at her and there's a look of horror and annoyance and resignation on his face,

'Not the first cop you got fired!'

'I guarantee the pay's better. Right now future you is thanking me'

She makes a sort of smirky, smug grin and it's that moment that Eldon Stammetts chooses to stride towards them and shoots the detective through the head. He turns to Freddie, shocked for a moment by the blood spatter.

'I read your article. Tell me about Will Graham'

Oh double dammit, her dad is going to be so pissed.

.....

Half an hour later the Feds and PD have arrived, she's being fed a warm drink by a sympathetic EMT. There's a blanket round her shoulders. Essentially she's cold-blooded but she appreciates the gesture.

'Jack?'

Jack walks over from where he'd been conferring, the detective's shrouded body is carried away on a stretcher.

'Ms Lounds, are you alright?'

'Where's Will Graham?'

'It's alright, there were witnesses, we don't need Will Graham'

'No, the guy, he was asking about Will Graham. He was talking about people having the same properties as fungus. Thoughts leaping from brain to brain, they mutate, they evolve'

'What does he want with Will Graham?'

'Someone who understands him. Graham was right, Stammetts is looking for connections'

'What did you tell him'

She looks down at her feet,

'I told him about Abigail Hobbs. He'll look for Will Graham there'

Jack groans and gets out his cell.

.....

Will opens the cupboard door and looks out. Ok. Well that was.... he searches his vocabulary. Nope, nope, not that, nope. His mind is a happy staticky buzz. He'd been kind of hoping for the golden rain, but well, the whole stag thing. He has a happy aroused shiver.

He heads back to Abigail's room and is surprised to finds someone there with her.

'Oh. Hello. Are you here to take Abigail for tests?'

'Are you Will Graham?'

'Err, what? Why?'

Oh buggeration. He's got a bad feeling about this. The other guy is about to speak when Will's cell rings. He holds up his hand to the guy as if to say, I'll just be a moment hang on, I better take this

'Hello? Uh huh. Uh huh. Really? That's super. You don't say. Lovely. Yes. I know. That's so gorgeous of you. Really. But that's really sweet thank you. So much. Oh, will you? I'm so looking forwards to seeing you too, is Hanni coming? Lovely. Thank you, byeeee'

He smiles sweetly at Eldon Stammetts.

At the other end of the call Jack looks at his cell, what the actual fuck? His end of the conversation goes pretty much,

'Will? Is that you? Will? What are you doing? Where are you? The guy's looking for you, Stammetts. What are you talking about? Are you ill? Are you on something? Shit! Is he there? He's there isn't he? We'll come right now. Hannibal? Ok, I'll call him. Don't worry we're coming. Keep him talking, as long as you can'

.....

Hannibal starts the Bentley. If A-te has... he decides not to think about it. Will will be fine. Though it's not so good that Stammetts is armed. It's always hard to explain bullet holes. Or rather when they should be there and they aren't. He has a brief flash back of the Crimea. Hmm. Always hard to tell an attending doctor or nurse that really you're fine, and yes it was a lovely Gattling gun, but honestly he's doing awfully well for someone who is an aeon old. He'd lost count around a few hundred thousands.

He reverses carefully and sends just a little warning out which more or less translates as

'if you're even thinking it? Don't. Will Graham is mine!'
.....

In the hospital Will has been compelled at gunpoint to walk ahead of Eldon Stammetts. Stammetts has taken Will's gun. Will grinds his teeth. Really it's a bit embarrassing. He mostly playing for time, as Jack asked, to give him time to arrive. And more importantly to give Hannibal time to arrive.

This is bloody Freddie Lound's fault. He'll sodding kill her. Oh actually maybe not have that thought. He's not a 100% sure that Hannibal can't read his mind and though she's as annoying as an itch in the middle of your back and you're not a yogi he doesn't actually want her really dead. Unless. Oh she couldn't be? Could she? Damn and blast.

Ok, so what he needs now is some kind of distraction, failing that a thunderbolt. Right, where's that sodding stag when he needs it?

At the entrance to the hospital Hannibal, Jack and Jack's complete back up arrive more or less simultaneously.

'He'll have been with the Hobbs girl, she's up on seven. He'll make for one of the car parks. We think he stole a car from the pharmacy. Try not to get shot Dr Lecter the paperwork would be horrendous'

Hannibal smiles tightly at him, this second he's more bothered about Will,

'Rear elevators, you go this way, I'll go the other'

Jack and Hannibal sprint in opposite directions, it takes a few seconds for Jack's brain to catch up, Wait? What? Who's in charge here?

He doesn't have a whole lot of time to process the thought as ahead he sees Will Graham and Eldon Stammetts spill out of a fire exit onto the tarmac. Jack's about to shout to Will when there's a small explosion off to his left at the back of the car park, then there's a little scream. Everyone ducks and Will uses the distraction to throw himself to the ground, grab back his gun, and squeeze off a shot, all in what he can later only describe as a "matrix moment". He gets Stammetts in the shoulder.

As they're both lying there Stammetts gasps out,

'I thought you understood me!'

'I don't' Will grunts back

'You would have, you would have. When you walk through a field of mycelium they reach for you, they know. I know who you're reaching for!'

Will just looks at him as Jack reaches Stammetts and Hannibal reaches Will.

'Fucking hell. I'm going to be sick. You did that time thing again didn't you? When I got the shot off?'

'My love. There were just so many things to do in such a short span. Are you well?'

'Peachy. Ughhh. I feel all... Thanks for the firework'

'Oh. I don't think that was me'

They both turn and look and on the far side of the car park Freddie Lounds gives them a little wave.

'I bloody knew it. Shit I feel all...'

He faints clean away. Fortunately he's not awake to see the universally admiring glances as Hannibal carries him bridal style around the hospital and back to the waiting Bentley. Freddie makes sure to get one or two piccies. Just in case.

.....

Half an hour later Hannibal opens his front door and ushers Will in ahead of him. Will is still shaking and somewhat discombobulated. He takes Will's jacket and hangs it in the hall closet.

'There we are. Here, come here'

He holds Will close and carefully exerts a little influence to help Will centre.

'What are you doing? You're doing something aren't you?'

'Just a tiny little thing. Just to help straighten you along, like a paddle'

'Alright. Just. I don't want everything rubbed out you know? I still want to be autonomous'

'I know. And I respect you deeply for it'

Will looks at him, Hannibal does his best butter-wouldn't-melt-in-a-volcano face.

'You better'

'Of course. Come into the kitchen. Let's find a morsel to eat and maybe a glass of something too?'

Will nods, still a little shaky. In the kitchen Hannibal pours Will a glass of red wine,

'Here, drink this my sweet, I think you are upset still, it will help. There's just a little something added. Nothing major, just a little tonic'

'Yeah? Oh alright. Thank you. Look. Of course I'm upset. I've spent years in the field and shot no one, had a problem with it, and now. God. Damn. Sorry. Now I've shot two people in the space of a month!'

'My love, I'm sorry. I forget it is so hard for you all'

'What? What do you mean?'

Will takes the proffered glass and smiles a thank you at Hannibal,

'That it all seems so quick, the blink of an eye and you're gone. Mortals live such a short time, I forget how upsetting it must be. Tell me, whose face did you see when you shot him?'

'Not Hobbs this time, Why?'

Hannibal leans against the table next to the chair Will is sitting on, the table had the usual emo-goth centrepiece of greenery, animal skulls, a bird's wing and what to Will looks like some pretty dodgy taxidermy.

'that is a good thing, it is not Hobbs who is haunting you. More the idea that there is someone so bad that killing him felt good, is that it?'

Will turns his head partially towards Hannibal, 'I don't know about good but, well, killing Hobbs felt just'

'I know. And he welcomed it, mostly. It's alright you know. Offerings are sometimes complex things. Which is why you're here really, to prove that sprig of zest is from saving Abigail not from killing her father'

Will frowns, to be sure Hannibal has a kind of long view of these things but damn, 'I didn't feel a sprig of zest when I shot Eldon Stammetts'

'But Will, my dearest, you didn't kill Eldon Stammetts, he's, well, we might call him an unfinished symphony'

'I thought about it. I'm still not entirely sure that wasn't my intention'

'If that was your intention, then it means you understand why he did the things he did. It's beautiful in its own way. Giving voice to the unmentionable. Giving voice to what he was yearning for. A connection to the infinite, to the everything'

'To you?'

Hannibal has a go at a modest smile. It doesn't quite come off. Will rolls his eyes. Still he can't think of any God he's read up on who's been particular good at the whole humility business. He stands up and turns and faces Hannibal, who is still leaning against the table. Comfortable.

'I liked killing Hobbs you know,' Will manages between gritted teeth.

Hannibal takes one of Will's hands and strokes it with his thumb, it tingles 'I know. And you were magnificent really. Like an anointed priest'

'Hannibal, you can't just say that kind of thing'

'I think I can, to you? My darling Will. Come here. Now you have a little taste of what gods feel. Do you really feel so bad because killing Hobbs felt so good? It feels good to gods too, we do it all the time, and are you not made in the image of a god?'

Hannibal strokes a hand down Will's cheek. Will wants to tell him to stop, that he's trying to get to a serious point, but it feels so nice.

'It depends who you ask doesn't it? Really?'

'Of course. But you know gods are terrific. Last week, I think it was Wednesday evening, a church roof got dropped on thirty worshippers, Texas, they were singing a hymn. It wasn't me. But well, I understand the impulse'

Will gives him a look that's trying to be a hard glare, and as far as Hannibal is concerned looks like slightly petulant puppy eyes, sweet Will he's just so adorable when he's worried, or cross, or upset,

'Did the god feel good about that?'

'He felt powerful'

Hannibal pauses for a moment and considers,

'And it was a terrible hymn'.

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